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ABSTRACT

THREE STUDIES, REQUESTED BY THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS, WERE CCNDUCTED BY THE SCUTHWESTERN COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY IN ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO, TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE INDIAN HIGH SCHCOL STUDENT AND GRADUATE IN THE SOUTHWEST. THESE STUDIES--A DROPOUT STUDY, A HIGH SCHOCL GRADUATE FOLLCW-UP STUDY, AND A 4-YEAR LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT--ARE SYNTHESIZED IN THE DOCUMENT AND EXAMINE FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS, POST HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATES, AND OPINIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES. SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS ARE CFFERED WHICH ARE AIMED AT 2 PROBLEM AREAS: (1) CORRECTING DEFICIENCIES IN BASIC COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF SPEAKING, LISTENING, READING, AND WRITING (UNIVERSAL PROBLEMS HINDERING THE INDIAN STUDENT) AND (2) IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIAN STUDENTS. (SW)

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"DROPOUT OR GRADUATE? A SYNTHESIS OF THREE STUDIES ON THE DEGREE OF SUCCESS OF AMERICAN INDIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE SOUTHWEST"

by

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Formal Indian education predates the American Revolution. In 1568 the Jesuits established in Havana, Cuba a school for the Florida Indians.(3) Fifty years later the Council of Jamestown, Virginia voted to educate Indian children,(6) but little action was taken until 1697 when an Indian school was formed in Williamsburg in connection with the newly founded College of William and Mary.(4) In the 1700's colleges such as Dartmouth and Hamilton were an outgrowth of Indian Schools.(5) The federal government launched its own educational system in the 1870's, of which the best known was the Carlisle Indian School. Run along military lines, with harsh discipline, it set the

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pattern for government Indian education for the next fifty years. Public school education for all Indians is a recent innovation, particularly in the Southwest.

Problem

Four questions that have been posed repeatedly in recent years by those interested in Indian education are: (1) What is the dropout rate among Indian students? (2) What happens to Indian youths after they graduate from high school? (3) What is their level of academic achievement? (4) What changes could be made to help the Indian student stay in school and prepare for a career?

To obtain answers to these questions, Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at the request of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, conducted in 1968 a Dropout Study, a High School Graduate Follow-up Study, and a four year longitudinal study of academic achievement (1966-70).

Procedure

Dropout Study

The first study,on the dropout rate,included 182 schools, of which 143 were public, 22 private and 17 Bureau of Indian Affairs, and was conducted in Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Southern Colorado and Southern Utah.

Schools enrolling Indian students in the six state region submitted lists of names of all Indian students enrolled in 8th grade in 1962, and 9th through 12th grades in each succeeding year to graduation in 1967. All names were alphabetized in a master computer list. The sample, randomly selected, totaled 1217. This was representative of the various tribes, types of schools and communities in the area. The computer lists facilitated tracing students, even when they disappeared from a school's lists, and every student was traced to eventual point of dropout, graduation, death or continuation in school.(7)

Graduate Study

Using the same population as the Dropout Study, a list was compiled of all

Indian graduates in 1962. The total sample was 691, of which 384 were personally interviewed in 18 states and Washington D. C. Criteria for qualifying as a subject included being one-fourth or more Indian ancestry, and considering oneself an Indian.

Instruments used were the Interview Guide and Questionnaire developed by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory for a similar study. By using the same instruments comparable data could then be provided within a 12 state area.(2)

Academic Achievement Study

This longitudinal study is being conducted in Alaska, Arizona, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Utah. Measuring instruments for the academic achievement study are the following: (1) California Achievement Test (C.A.T.), Forms Y and W, 1957 - Pre and Post; (2) California Test of Mental Maturity (C.T.M.M.), short form, Level 4, 1963; (3) Questionnaire (Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory); (4) Semantic Differential (Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory); School Interest Inventory, William Cottle, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966; (6) California Psychological Inventory.

To compare academic achievement of the various groups post-test California Achievement Test (C.A.T.) raw scores were used as a criterion, and differences in group means were tested by analysis of covariance. The California Test of Mental Maturity (C.T.M.M.) intelligence quotient scores were used as a scholastic aptitude control, and the pre-test C.A.T. raw scores were used as a prior achievement control.(1)

Findings

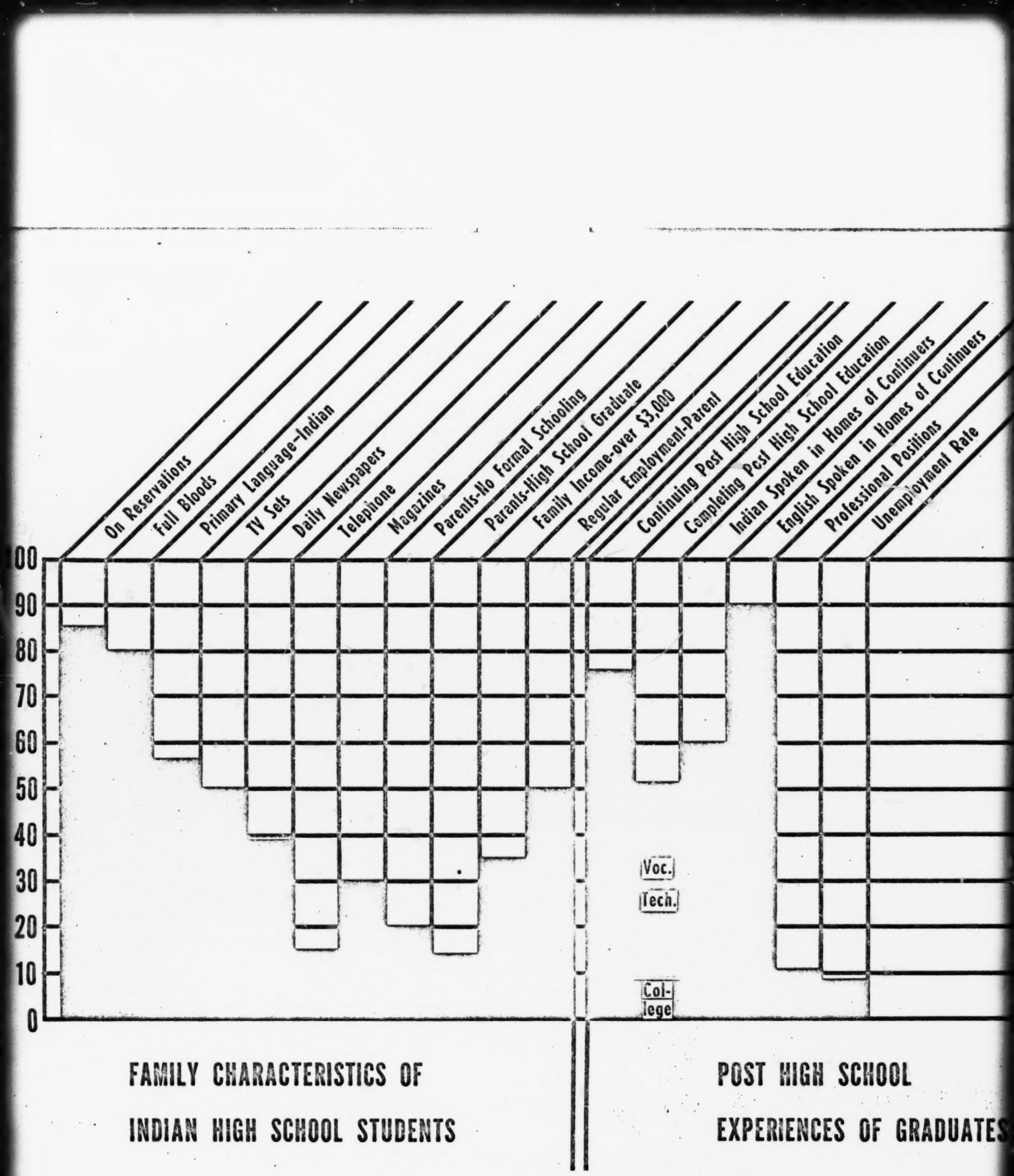
Pertinent findings from the three studies have been synthesized to provide information about the Indian high school student and graduate in the Southwest.

Family Characteristics (refer to chart)

1. 85% of the Indian high school students in the Southwest live on reservations, excluding Oklahoma, which does not have reservations.
2. About 80% are full bloods.
3. For the majority an Indian language is the primary language of the home.
4. About one-half of the homes have T. V. sets, but less than one-half receive a daily newspaper, and only one out of six has a telephone.
5. 20% of the parents have had no formal schooling, and only one parent in seven is a high school graduate.
6. One father in three earns more than $3,000 per year. Only about one-half are regularly employed.

High School Student Characteristics

1. Absenteeism is high.
2. A majority would rather work with mechanical things than read or write stories, and prefer athletics over other school activities.
3. The dropout rate is high. While the national high school dropout rate is 23%, 39% of the Indian students in the Southwest, both male and female, drop out between 8th grade and graduation; the greatest attrition occuring between 8th and 9th grades, where dropout is about 12%.
4. Academic achievement is low. Total battery scores on the California Achievement Tests show 9th graders ranking at the 27th percentile, with academic retardation of one year. 12th graders had dropped to the 14th percentile, with three years academic retardation. Reading followed this overall pattern. Boys demonstrated a slight superiority over girls in reading, while girls scored higher in language.



FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

POST HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATES

Post High School Experiences of Graduates (refer to preceding chart)

1. 74% of the high school graduates of 1962 continued their education, mostly in vocational-technical programs.
2. 51% completed a post-high school training program, with 44% completing vocational-technical programs and only 7% completing college.
3. When the tribal language was never or rarely spoken in the home, 89% continued their education. Only 60% continued when the native language was dominant.
4. At the time of the interview, more than six years after high school graduation, about two-thirds were working for pay, but only one in eight was in a professional position. There was only one college graduate engineer and no doctors or lawyers. Teachers comprised the largest group of professionals.
5. The value of a high school education for these people is demonstrated by the low unemployment rate of 8% for high school graduates.

Retrospective Opinions of High School Graduates

1. A majority of those who continued their education expressed satisfaction with the course of action they had taken. A majority of non-continuers expressed regret over their decision.
2. Graduates named parents, then teachers, as the sources of most encouragement to continue their education.
3. One-half of the students in the sample felt they had received inadequate information on educational and employment opportunities while in high school.
4. The need for more vocational education was most often mentioned by non-continuers, while the continuers asked for more emphasis on academic subjects, improved teaching, higher scholastic requirements and more guidance and counseling.

5. The graduates said the chief reasons that many of their classmates did not graduate were lack of personal interest or motivation, lack of home encouragement, and poor financial or social conditions at home.
6. More than nine out of ten of the graduates said they had never experienced prejudice in high school.
7. A large majority believed it important to be able to speak their tribal language because of the desirability of communicating with older people of the tribe.
8. More than three-quarters of the graduates considered themselves succesful.

Recommendations

The almost universal problem hindering or defeating the Indian student in the Southwest is the language handicap. He is deficient in the basic communication skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

From interpretation of the data of the three studies, it is recommended that schools should have:

(1) Better and more widespread programs of teaching English as a second language;

(2) Intensive instruction through the grades in developmental reading, writing and study skills;

(3) More culturally relevant curricula to make school experiences more meaningful and to ensure pride in one's heritage;

(4) Special training for all teachers and counselors of Indian children;

(5) Better content and increased number of vocational education courses;

(6) Better academic preparation and orientation for college-bound students with more intensive counseling and tutoring after college enrollment;

(7) More Indians involved in school management.

Further in-depth studies of the Indian dropout could include examination of causal factors and indicated changes. Because of the high dropout rate discovered at the 8th grade level, we would profit if any continuing investigation included lower grade levels.

Improving educational opportunities for Indian students is a worthy goal. The results of these three studies point up the great need for prompt and concerted action on the part of involved educators.

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